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Statement of James Firman, chair
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Those with Limited Incomes Should Apply for Medicare's Extra Help

The following statement was released at a Department of Health and Human Services press briefing this morning. Along with HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt and CMS Administrator Mark McClellan, members of the ABC Steering Committee also offered comments.

Beginning in January 2006, more than 14 million people with Medicare who have limited incomes may start to receive extra help from the government that will pay for between 85 percent and 100 percent of their prescription drug costs. At least seven million of these people will not get this help automatically, so they must apply for it.

People with Medicare who have limited incomes will be substantially better off with this coverage. In most cases, they will save several hundred to several thousand dollars in 2006 by signing up for extra help with their prescription costs. In addition to reducing out-of-pocket costs in 2006, signing up for the extra help available through the Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage will also provide consumers with important protection against higher future drug costs.

The 100 national non-profit groups who are members of the Access to Benefits Coalition are united in urging all Medicare beneficiaries who may be eligible for the extra help to sign up. We call on community groups and family members to help Medicare beneficiaries with limited incomes to learn about and apply for the extra help.

Over the next several months, ABC members and their 56 local Coalitions representing hundreds of non-profit organizations – in partnership with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Social Security Administration -- will be making extraordinary efforts to reach out and enroll those who should qualify for the extra help.

The Access to Benefits Coalition (ABC) is dedicated to ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries with limited incomes know about and can make the best use of all available resources for reducing the costs of prescription drugs, including the extra help available through the Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage (starting in 2006). Coalition members share an interest in helping millions of people with Medicare likely to be eligible for this extra help (including both those aged 65 and over as well as younger persons with disabilities who qualify) find the prescription savings they need to maintain their health and improve the quality of their lives.

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